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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 006343

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI ACADEMIC WARNS THAT LEBANON FOMENTS EXTREMISM
REF: RIYADH 6342

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: On August 6 a politically mainstream Saudi academic and journalist, Dr. Ali Sa'ad al-Musa, published an open letter to President Bush in the widely-read al-Watan newspaper, warning that he and millions of other moderates in the Middle East are becoming extremists as a direct result of President Bush's reaction to the Lebanon crisis (reftel). Throughout the letter, al-Musa told of his dismay with President Bush's global policies on terrorism and worries that the missteps taken by the Bush administration will breed a generation of freedom-fighting terrorists, not freedom-loving academics. Dr. Sa'ad almost certainly meant his statement as an emotional warning of the decline of the U.S. reputation in the eyes of the Middle Eastern public, and not as a literal threat. That said, as a prominent, generally liberal Saudi scholar, who has been an avid U.S. supporter in the past, his emotional public response to the crisis in Lebanon is indicative of the increasingly negative Saudi public mood towards the United States. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶2. (U) Dr. Ali Sa'ad al-Musa wrote an open letter to President Bush in the al-Watan newspaper, where he has been working as a regular columnist for over four years. The August 6 letter began with a self-introduction, which spoke of his liberal political tendencies and traditional support for the United States. He immediately commented that his support for the U.S., which has been criticized by many of his peers, has waned and has been replaced with the fear that he and his children will have no feasible reaction to the U.S. except to become extremists. He told President Bush that "every time Al-Qaeda succeeds in recruiting a new extremist, George Bush surpasses it by (effectively recruiting) four extremists." He described the current struggle with terrorism as a "race in breeding (extremists)."

¶3. (U) Al-Musa addressed President Bush directly and stated that the speech delivered in Miami on the Lebanon crisis was the last straw. He talked of British television airing the speech with a split screen showing the death and destruction from Qana on one side, and President Bush on the other. He states, "Mr. President, at that moment I remembered the army of extremists, which the United States pushes towards hell. Your Excellency, the world is not too stupid or too naive to understand where terrorism is and where freedom is. Had a dumb animal seen that television screen with its two halves--you on one side and the children of Qana on the other side--it would have understood where terrorism resides and where freedom is being abused."

¶4. (U) He expressed sorrow for the September 11th attacks, the Madrid train bombings and the London Underground attacks. But with this sorrow came more sorrow at the change in attitudes of the moderate people in the Middle East. He

commented, "let me tell you truthfully, we do not fear the al-Qaeda factory of extremism as much as we fear the millions of moderates who are pushed by the Bush industry toward following the line of terrorism. Let me tell you truthfully that your policy today is more dangerous than all the world's terrorist organizations. Let me tell you truthfully that I am afraid my children might cross this line, not under the influence of the dwindling al-Qaeda, but in reaction to the fire and brimstone pouring from your throats, bombs, aircraft and smart missiles." He ended this passage with his feelings of shame for being accused of following the U.S. bandwagon in the current circumstances.

¶5. (U) Al-Musa highlighted the plight of the Palestinian people in the context of discussing the root cause of the current war in Lebanon. He talked about the hypocrisy of the U.S. in 'blessing' Israel's actions in crossing the Green Line thousands of times to capture 10,000 prisoners, while condemning the recent capture of three Israeli soldiers. Using the analogy of a dog, he stated, "While your pampered dog, and its canine ancestors, travel everywhere in the world with an identification card and a health certificate, these Palestinian people still have a long way to go before achieving such a status."

¶6. (U) In closing, al-Musa warned that this letter might be his last because, "a new address by you on television will turn me into yet another extremist bomb. You are the biggest base (used the Arabic word 'Qaeda') against moderation, tolerance, and truth."

Background on Al-Musa

¶7. (C) Al-Musa's writings include broad topics ranging from school curricula and women's rights to government corruption and the Lebanon crisis. In general, he takes a very liberal viewpoint regarding the need to open Saudi society and promote greater rights for the people. His emotional criticism of the U.S. over the Lebanon crisis is at variance with his typically positive view toward America. On August 7, he published an article criticizing the Saudi people's reaction to Lebanon as weak in comparison to Afghanistan. He called into question why the Saudi people are not praying for the Lebanese people as hard as they prayed for Afghani people and asked why no one has called for a Jihad.

¶8. (C) BIO NOTE: Dr. Ali Sa'ad al-Musa has been a daily writer for al-Watan newspaper, an Arabic-language newspaper published in Abha, Saudi Arabia, for five years. Al-Watan, which has a liberal reputation, is owned by the al-Faisal family. Prior to that, he was a translator for al-Watan and is also a consultant to the newspaper. He is a professor at King Khalid University in Abha and focuses his writing on political and social issues. According to a March 2005 media interview, al-Musa is a liberal U.S.-educated scholar, self-described as "swimming against the current of Saudi society" because he believes that its culture is partially responsible for terrorism. END BIO NOTE.
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